THE DIVINE PAGEANT

ACT 1 GOD AND MAN IN THE STREET

HE WAS RIDING ON A DONKEY AND PEOPLE CALLED HIM A KING, THEIR WERE NO FLAGS, NO SOLDIERS, NO SPEARS AND PEOPLE SAID THERE WOULD BE A NEW KINGDOM: THERE WAS NO POMP, NO FLOWING ROBES AND REGAL ATTIRE AND PEOPLE CRIED OUT IN JOY ("HOSSANA PRAISE GOD IN THE HIGHEST.") FIVE DAYS LATER HE WAS TO DIE LIKE A COMMON CRIMINAL AND YET PEOPLE SAID THIS IS THE MESSIAH, THE ANNOINTED ONE OF THE LORD. THEY SPREAD THEIR COATS AND BRANCHES FROM THE TREES, (PALM BRANCHES) IN HIS PATH, AND OVER THEM HE MADE HIS ENTRANCE INTO THE CITY OF JERUSALEM, A HUMBLE MAN RIDING ON A DONKEY.

AND SO WE HAVE CALLED THIS PALM SUNDAY, TRADITIONALLY A TIME OF REJOICING. THE DAY BEGAN A WEEK SO PACKED WITH ACTIVITY AND SIGNIFICANCE THAT THE MAJOR PART OF THE GOSPELS IS DEVOTED TO ITS RECORD. IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT IF THE ONLY KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST WE HAD WAS THAT CONCERNING THE ONE WEEK PERIOD FROM PALM SUNDAY TO EASTER MORNING WE WOULD HAVE ENOUGH. IT WAS A WEEK THAT COULD WELL SERVE AS A RESUME OF JESUS' WHOLE LIFE AND ONE OF THE OUTSTANDING EVENTS IN THAT WEEK WAS THE TRIUMPHANT ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

I THINK WE, AT TIMES FAIL TO GRASP THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS EVENT. PALM SUNDAY IS MERELY A TIME FOR LOUD SINGING AND HAPPINESS. AND SO THIS MORNING I WOULD LIKE TO

the Biblical account of that

DWELL MAINLY ON ~~THE~~ EVENT. NOT HOW IT ACCUSES OR REDEEMS US, BUT WHAT IT MEANT THEN AND THERE, WHAT IT MEANT TO THE PEOPLE WHO CRIED HOSSANA, TO THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES, WHO WAITED WORRIEDLY IN THE TEMPLE FOR HIS ARRIVAL AND WHAT IT MEANT TO OUR LORD HIMSELF. WE DO WELL AT TIMES TO CONCENTRATE ENTIRELY ON the WORDS OF THE Bible without a minister's intergretation. THIS IS A STORY THAT SPEAKS FOR ITSELF - I invite you to look at in depth

THE PEOPLE WHO WENT OUT TO MEET HIM WERE, WE CAN IMAGINE, PEASANTS, THE POVERTY STRICKEN, THE HUNGRY AND THE SICK. THEY HAD HEARD RUMORS AND STORIES ABOUT THIS MAN FROM NAZARETH, HOW HE HAD HEALED THE SICK AND MADE THE BLIND SEE. THEY HAD EVEN HEARD THAT HE MIGHT ORGANIZE AN ARMY AND RID PALESTINE OF THE HATED ROMANS. AND THEN SOMEONE HAD TOLD THEM THAT JESUS RIDING ON A DONKEY WAS A FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY. ZECHARIAH HAD SAID "HERE COMES YOUR KING, TRIUMPHANT AND VICTORIOUS, RIDING HUMBLY ON THE FOAL OF AN ASS.) THE PROPHETS WERE REVERED EVEN BY THE PEASANTRY AND SO WHEN THEY HEARD THAT JESUS MIGHT BE A FULFILLMENT OF ONE OF GREAT MEN'S WORDS THEIR JOYFUL ABANDON WAS INCREASED EVEN MORE.

WHEN THEY SAW OUR LORD, THE QUIET HUMILITY, THE SERENITY AND LOVE THAT BEAMED FROM HIS FACE THEY WERE OVERWHELMED, TEARING THE COATS FROM THEIR BACKS AND STREWING PALM BRANCHES ON THE ROAD THAT HE MIGHT HAVE A SUITABLE RECEPTION. PERHAPS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE HEARTFELT JOY OF THE OCCASION IS TO COMPARE IT THE WINNING T.D. OVERTIME AT A FOOTBALL GAME. IN SHEER EXUBERANCE HATS FLY INTO THE AIR AND THERE IS

ABSOLUTE
~~SHEER~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ APANDON IN THE JOY OF THE MOMENT.

THE CRAOWD'S RECOGNITION OF THEIR LORD IS SIGNIFICANT BUT AS WE SHALL SEE THERE LOVE AND JOY WAS COMPLETELY ALTERED IN A FEW DAYS.

THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES SAT IN THE TEMPLE AND LISTENED TO THE TUMULTOUS DIN AS THE PROCESSION APPROACHED THE CITY GATES. THEY HAD BEEN VERY MUCH AWARE OF THIS MAN JESUS ACTIVITIES OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS. THEY KNEW WELL HOW HE HAD INSULTED THEIR COLLEAGUES IN OTHER CITIES, HOW HE HAD OVERTLY BROKEN THE MOST SACRED LWAS OF THE SABBATH: THEY HAD HEARD THAT SOME PEOPLE WERE CALLING HIM THE CHRIST, THE MESSIAH OF GOD AND THIS FRIGHTENED THEM. THE SLIGHT WORRY TURNED INTO ANXIETY AS THEY REALIZED WHAT A STIR JESUS HAD CREATED, (EVEN BEFORE HE ENTERED THE CITY.)

THE IRONY OF THIS GROUP OF MEN IS TYPICAL OF THEIR ROLE IN THE WHOLE GOSPEL STORY. THEY KNEW THE SCRIPTURES AND LAW IN AND OUT, THERE WAS NOT ONE PROPHETIC UTTERANCE THAT THEY HAD NOT COMMITTED TO MEMORY AND QUOTED OVER AND OVER. THEY KNEW ~~THE NINTH AND TENTH~~ ~~VERSES~~ OF THE NINTH CAHPTER OF ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY ("THERE COMES YOUR KING, TRIUMPHANT AND VICTORIOUS, RIDING HUMBLY ON AN ASS, ON THE FOAL OF AN ASS! HE BANISHES ALL CHARIOTS FROM EPHRIAM, WAR HORSES FROM JERUSALEM AND BATTLE HORNS: HIS WORDS MAKE PEACE FOR THE NATIONS, HIS SWAY EXTENDS FROM SEA TO SEA, FROM THE EUPHRATES TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.") THESE WERE WORDS THE PRIESTS AND SCRIBES CHERISHED DEARLY, THEY SPOKE OF A

TIME ORF FULFILLMENT, OF RECKNONING INDEED THESE MEN HAD PRAYED FOR THIS KING MANY TIMES, PRAYED THAT THEIR GENERATION MIGHT BE THE ONE TO RECEIVE HIM.

(AS IS SO HUMAN) THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES WATCHED THIS DREAM UNFOLD BENEATH THEIR EYES, AND YET COULD NOT SEE IT. AS HAPPENS SO FREQUENTLY THEIR FONDEST HOPE WAS BEING GRANTED BUT THEY COULD NOT BELIEVE IT. THIS MAN MUST BE AN IMPOSTER, A BLASPHEMER. THEY COULD NOT LET THE THOUGHT THAT HE WAS THE MESSIAH ENTER THEIR MINDS FOR WORRYING ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WHEN HE MADE HIS APPEARANCE AT THE TEMPLE. IF HE WAS TRUE TO FORM HE WOULD INSULT THEM A FEW TIMES, CALL THEM HYPOCRITES, MAKE THEM LOOK SILLY IN DEBATE AND THEN HE WOULD PREACH TO THE PEOPLE AND THEY WOULD LISTEN.

AS YOU WELL KNOW JESUS DID NOT DISAPPOINT THEM, THE FIRST THING HE DID WAS TO GO TO THE TEMPLE AND DRIVE OUT THE MONEY CHANGERS.

THE MORE LEGALISTIC AND POLITICAL MINDED OF THE SCRIBES REALIZED THAT JESUS POSED A REAL THREAT TO THEIR VERY EXISTENCE IN A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT WAYS. FIRSTLY, THE ONLY FREEDOMTHE JEWS HAD WAS FREEDOM OF RELIGION, BUT IF SOME RELIGIOUS DISPUTE SHOULD CAUSE A DISTURBANCE, A RIOT OR FIGHT, THE ROMANS WOULD DESCEND ON THEM, NOT ONLY TAKING AWAY RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BUT ALSO THEIR MEANS OF INCOME.

SECONDLY, PROBABLY ALL OF THEIR NUMBER KNEW THAT JESUS HAD QUITE A FOLLOWING/ THAT AFTER HE HAD DEPARTED FROM A COMMUNITY TEMPLE REVENUES SEEMED AUTOMATICALLY TO DECLINE. JESUS HAD PROVED HIMSELF THE BETTER SPIRITUAL LEADER AND THEY WERE THE VICTIMS OF PROFESSIONAL ~~JEALOUSY~~ Jealousy.

ON THE WHOLE, HOWEVER, WE DON'T WANT TO BE TOO HARD ON THE SCRIBES AND CHIEF PRIESTS, THEY WERE HUMAN JUST AS YOU AND I. THEIR ONLY RPROBLEM, (AND OURS TOO,) IS THAT THEY WERE SO INVOLVED IN COMMONPLACE, EVERYDAY AFFAIRS THAT THEY COULD NOT SEE THE DIVINE WHEN IT CAME INTO THEIR PRESENCE. THE LAMB OF GOD, THE ONE FOR WHOM THEY HAD PRAYED, WAS ABOUT TO ENTER THE CITY, BUT THEY, OF ALL PEOPLE, DID NOT UNDERSTAND.

AS THE NOISE BECAME LOUDER AND DOUDER THE PRIESTS AND SCRIBES BEGAN TO/RATIONALLY SURVEY THEIR PREDICAMENT. THERE WAS ONLY ONE SOLUTION, THEY HAD TO GET RID OF HIM QUICKLY. IT WAS THEN THAT THE DIE WAS CAST, THEY BEGAN IMMEDIATELY WITH THEIR DIABOLICAL PLOT TO INCRIMINATE HIM, TO SHOW THAT HE WAS AN OFFENSE TO ROME. IT TOOK THEM FIVE DAYS TO SUCCEED,/ THEY DID AN EFFECIENT JOB,/ EVERY DETAIL FROM BETRAYER TO ANGRY MOB THEY ARRANGED,/ VERY SHORTELY THEY COULD BREATH FREELY AGAIN.

Pause

IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN JESUS' MIND AS HE ROAD INTO JERUSALEM ON THAT DONKEY. DID HE KNOW THE INEVITABLE RESULT OF HIS ENTRANCE INTO THE HOLY CITY, DID HE EXPECT TO CARRY ON OR DID HE KNOW HIS TIME HAD COME? ?

WE CAN NEVER BE CERTAIN OF THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS, HOWEVER, SOME LIGHT IS SHED ON THEM BY LOOKING CAREFULLY AT THE EVENT AS SUCH.

IF WE LOOK BACK THROUGH JESUS LIFE WE DISCOVER THAT HE NEVER CAME RIGHT OUT AND STATED THAT HE WAS THE CHRIST. HE LET OTHERS SAY IT FOR HIM, HE VAGUELY CONFIRMED HIS DISCIPLES SUSPICIONS WHEN THEY QUESTIONED HIM ON THE MATTER. PERHAPS IT WAS TOO GREAT A THING FOR HIS CONTEMPORARIES TO COMPREHEND. BIBLICAL SCHOLARS CALL THIS PHENOMENON THE "MESSIANIC SECRET." OUR LORD PROBABLY CONTINOUSLY WRESTLED WITH THIS PROBLEM: AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY HE SPENT FORTY DAYS IN THE DESERT DECIDING HOW HE SHOULD BEST CARRY OUT HIS FATHER'S WORK. HE DECIDED AGAINST WIELDING HIS DIVINE POWER IN A MIRACULOUS LEAP FROM THE TEMPLE: HE LIKEWISE DISCARDED THE ALTERNATIVE OF TAKING OVER POLITICAL POWER. HIS METHOD WOULD BE LIKE THAT OF THE GARDNER, WHO PLANTS A SEED, WATERS AND CULTIVATES IT AND HELPS IT GROW TO A FRUIT BEARING PLANT. LITTLE BY LITTLE WOULD HE REVEAL HIS MISSION AND NATURE TO HIS FOLLOWERS. THEY WOULD UNDERSTAND ALL IN THE END, (HE WAS SURE OF THAT.)

JUST PRIOR TO HIS ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM JESUS HAD HEAVILY IMPLIED TO PETER THAT HE WAS THE CHRIST, BUT NOW THE TIME HAD COME TO OUTRIGHTLY STATE IT. HE KNEW WHAT HE MUST DO, HE MUST ENTER THE HOLY CITY OF JERUSALEM IN FULFILLMENT OF ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY, RIDING ON A DONKEY. AND SO WE COME TO THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT IN THE NARRATIVE. THIS WAS JESUS' WAY OF ANNOUNCING THAT HE WAS THE KING OF ISRAEL, THE ONE GOD, THROUGH THE PROPHETS, HAD PROMISED. IT WAS ONLY A FEW DAYS LATER THAT HE WAS TO OUTRIGHTLY ADMIT THAT HE WAS THE CHRIST-AS PILATE QUESTIONED HIM. BUT FOR NOW, THIS WAS THE MOST MEANINGFUL WAY HE COULD GET HIS MESSAGE ACROSS. OBVIOUSLY HE SUCCEEDED.

WE ALSO CAN BE SURE THAT HE KNEW WHAT WAS AHEAD OF HIM. AS HE WATCHED THE JOYFUL THRONG, SINGING HOSSANA'S AND CLAIMING HIM KING THE SHADOW OF THE CORSS MUST HAVE OCCURED TO HIM. HE REALIZED WHAT EFFECT HIS PRESENCE WOULD HAVE ON THE RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE GREAT CITY, HE KNEW THAT THERE WAS NOT ROOM FOR THEM AND HIM, AND THAT THEY WOULD FIND A WAY OF GETTING RID OF HIM. KNOWING THAT HE WAS RIDING TO SURE DEATH HE ENTERED JERUSALEM, / THIS WAS THE END / THIS IS WHAT HE WAS APPOINTED TO DO.

AND SO IN HUMBLE LOVE HE ALLOWED THE CROWD TO HAVE ITS FLING. IN COMPLETE FORGIVENSS HE RODE AMIDST THEM BEARING THE HEART BREAKING IRONY THAT THIS SAME CROWD THAT WAS SHOUTING "HOSSANA" WOULD VERY SHORTLY BE SCREAMING "AWAY WITH WHIM, CRUCIFY HIM."

THIS IS PERHAPS THE MOST MOVING ASPECT OF THE ENTIRE DRAMA. JESUS KNEW HE WAS THE CHRIST, HE KNEW WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF HIM. HE KNEW THAT HIS TASK WOULD NOT BE COMPLETED UNTIL HE HAD DIED AT THE HANDS OF THIS CROWD. HE REALIZED, AS NO ONE ELSE AROUND HIM DID, THAT TO FULLY REVEAL THE LOVE OF GOD HE HAD TO SUFFER. THIS WAS HIS ASSIGNMENT. HE DID NOT HESITATE, OR GO THE OTHER DIRECTION, BUT WILLINGLY WALKED INTO THE CLUTCHES OF DEATH, THAT HIS BELOVED MANKIND MIGHT LIVE.

WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO SAY ON PALM SUNDAY? CAN WE DO ANY MORE THAN REMEMBER THE JOY, THE TRAGEDY AND THE IRONY OF THE DAY? THE STORY SPEAKS FOR ITSELF. AND IN THE PROSPECT OF MAKING THIS RESEMBLE A SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON OR A LECTURE I HAVE RELATED IT IN ITS DETAIL.

IF THERE IS ANY PART OF THE PALM SUNDAY STORY THAT APPLIES TO OUR PRESENT DAY SITUATION IT IS THE FICKLENESS OF THE CROWD. THEY WERE FILLED WITH ELATION AS THEIR LORD ENTERED THE CITY IN TRIUMPH. THEY WERE BY HIS SIDE SINGING PRAISES OF JOY AND THANKSGIVING, THROWING THEIR GARMENTS DOWN SO THAT HE SHOULD NOT HAVE TO TREAD ON BARE GROUND.

WHERE WAS THIS HAPPY GROUP WHEN PILATE PRESENTED JESUS FROM THE PALACE BALCONY AND ASKED IF HE SHOULD BE RELEASED? WHERE WERE THE HOSSANA'S WHEN THE CRY RANG OUT CRUCIFY HIM!? AS THE CHRIST SUFFERED IN AGONY ON THE CROSS WHERE WERE THOSE GARMENTS THAT COVERED THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM? WHY WERE THEY NOT THERE TO COVER OUR LORD'S OPEN WOUNDS?

OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS I HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTING TO PROJECT OURSELVES INTO THE PEOPLE WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE DRAMA OF CALVARY. HERE AGAIN WE CAN LOOK INTO THE MIRROR AND SEE OUR OWN REFLECTIONS. ARE WE NOT LIKE THIS FICKLE CROWD THAT PRAISED THE CHRIST IN HIS MOMENT OF TRIUMPH, BUT THAT VANISHED WHEN THEIR KING WAS HUMILIATED AND CRUCIFIED? ?

WE ARE ON GOOD TERMS WITH OUR FAITH AS LONG AS EVERYTHING IS ROSY, AS LONG AS IT CAN BE LIMITED TO A SUNDAY A MONTH IN CHURCH. BUT WHEN WE FIND IT MAKING DEMANDS ON US, (FINANCIAL OR MORAL) WHEN IT ~~DEMANDS~~ REQUIRES A FIRM STAND HERE AND THERE DO WE VANISH LIKE THE CROWD? OR CAN WE SAY, ("I AM WITH YOU LORD, WHATEVER YOU ~~DEMAND~~ ASK OF ME.")

THIS HAS BEEN THE COMMON CHORD THAT HAS RUN THROUGH OUR LENTEN THEME AND I DO NOT WANT TO PUSH IT ANY FURTHER T IS MORNING. BUT AS WE OBSERVE THE FIRST ACT OF THE DIVINE PAGEANT OF HOLY WEEK THIS SCENE STICKS OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB. ARE WE PART OF A CROWD THAT IS LOYAL TO THE END (OR DO OUR HOSSANA'S BECOME TRANSFORMED TO "CRUCIFY HIM"?)

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER THERE WER TWO DAYS IN THE YEAR ON WHICH I DID NOT KNOW HOT TO FEEL, GOOD FRIDAY AND PALM SUNDAY. THE GENERAL ~~TENOR~~ tone OF THE DAY SEEMS TO BE GLADNESS, AND YET HOW CAN WE BE GLAD KNOWING THE EVENTS THAT WILL FOLLOW? I THINK PERHAPS WE ~~MISS~~ LESS THE POINT ~~OF~~ IF THE TRIUMPHANT ENTRY OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM BECOMES THE EPITOME OF OUR JOY. CERTAINLY WE SING HOSSANA TO OUR LORD AND KING, SURELY WE ARE HAPPY THAT HE AT LEAST HAD THIS ONE VERY SHORT EXPERIENCE OF VISIBLE VICTORY.

MORE APPROPRIATELY, HOWEVER, WE MIGHT REGARD THIS DAY AS A PRELUDE, A SHORT BREATHING SPELL BEFORE THE ALL IMPORTANT AND ALL SIGNIFICANT EVENT OF CALVARY. WE MUST CONSTANTLY KEEP IN MIND THE FACT THAT JESUS CHOSE THIS DAY TO BE THE BEGINNING OF THE END. THIS SUNDAY OF HAPPINESS IS THE FIRST STEP TO REDEEMPTION. IN COMPLETE REVERENCE AND AWE WE MUST TEMPER OUR PALM SUNDAY CLEBRATION WITH THE SHADOW OF A CROSS AND THE IMAGE OF A DYING SAVIOR.

BE JOYOUS, SING HOSSANA BUT PONDER SERIOUSLY THE WORDS OF THE HYMN.

RIDE ON, RIDE ON IN MAJESTY! IN LOWLY POMP RIDE ON TO DIE! O, CHRIST, THY TRIUMPS NOW BEGIN, O'ER CAPTIVE DEATH AND CONQUERED SIN.

RIDE ON, RIDE ON IN MAJESTY. THE LAST AND FIERCEST STRIFE IS NIGH, BOW THY MEEK HEAD TO MORTAL PAIN, THEN TAKE, O CHRIST THY POWER AND REIGN.

AMEN.

O Lord God Almighty, in deep humility we begin this most sacred of weeks. Be present with us as we share the passion, the agony & victory of our Lord.

Instill in us sensitivity of heart that we may see the true significance of this day. As we celebrate our Lord's triumphant entry help us to open our lives that he may make his entry also